

**NARRATOR: Leo Compton**  
**INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves**  
**DATE: October 27, 1999**  
**LOCATION: Boise, Idaho**  
**PROJECT: Smokejumpers**

<b>Tape Counter</b>	<b>Manu. Page</b>	<b>Summary</b>
000		Introduction
010		Compton's family was originally from Texas. He talked briefly about his life outside of smokejumping.
025		Compton's friends, Bernie Nielsen, and his brother Glen, convinced him to submit an application to the smokejumpers. Both Compton and Nielsen served in the Air Force. He talked about his service in World War II. Compton never saw action outside of the United States.
055		Compton talked about the physical training involved in being a smokejumper. His training helped him play football for Boise Junior College and fight fires.
070		Part of his training was jumping from the tower. Compton discussed jumping from the tower. He continued to talk about his first jump.
090		Compton jumped twenty-four times. He jumped out of McCall and from Idaho City with a foreman named James "Smoky" Stover. He told a story about jumping out near the Idaho City camp. He jumped from Idaho City with a Noordyn-Norseman airplane.
120		Compton discussed the differences between the various types of airplanes—the Noordyn-Norseman, the Ford Trimotor, and the Travel Aire.
135		Four jumpers beside Compton jumped on one fire, and the cargo chute was stuck to the plane. Everyone on the plane jumped, including the spotter. The chute tore from the plane before the pilot landed.
160		Compton said that Idaho City was a great place to be a smokejumper.

- 175 Compton's last jump was on Pack Saddle Creek. He caught his chute in a tree. He fell from the tree to the ground and dislocated his ankles and wrists. He also broke two ribs. He continued to talk about how the other smokejumpers, including Don Pape, packed him back to the road.
- 210 The plane dropped a stretcher, which the other smokejumpers used to pack Compton out. Except for the initial black out, Compton remembered most of the journey to the road. He feared about his internal injuries because he did not know that he just broke two ribs.
- 235 Compton did not play football the next fall. He coached football at Wendell with his high school football coach. He went back to Idaho State College the next year to play football. Later in life he returned to coaching.
- 265 Compton detailed the steps involved in fighting a specific fire from the moment the fire was called until he returned to camp. He and Clyde Hawley tried to get to a fire as quickly as possible; they forgot the map. They estimated how to get back to a road or trail.
- 325 Compton continued telling about how he fought fires. He talked about what person, if any, was in charge on individual fires. He also mentioned what equipment they kept in their pack and what tools the spotter dropped out of the plane. He also talked about what streamers to use to tell the situation to the plane's crew.
- 395 The crew at camp provided the smokejumpers with a map which would tell them where to go after they contained the fire. A pack string met the smokejumpers after the fire. A man, his horse, and a mule or mules, would help the crew pack the material back to camp. If the walk was not difficult, the smokejumpers would carry their own equipment back to camp.
- 450 Compton furnished information about the location, the buildings, the food, and the protocols at the McCall smokejumpers' camp.
- 490 **END OF SIDE ONE**  
**SIDE TWO**

- 000 Compton continued to talk about details of the McCall camp, in particular the parachute loft room.
- 015 Compton jumped from Idaho City for one summer. They jumped from a Forest Service camp. He briefly described how the camp looked in 1948. The camp at Idaho City is still there; it is still a Forest Service camp.
- 035 McCall was a different town in 1947. Compton mentioned places, such as the Shore Lodge, the Yacht Club, and the Foresters' Club. He also mentioned the Mill and Crystal Beach Condos. People in McCall really treated the smokejumpers well. Compton mentioned two smokejumpers who acted tough when in town, and they never returned to the smokejumpers after the year. He continued to tell stories about what they did in McCall when they were not fighting fire, including playing baseball against teams from Riggins and Stibnite.
- 075 1947 was a good fire season. Compton fought many fires during the summer and spent days away from camp. He talked about the pay and the overtime received during the summer.
- 100 Compton worked on other projects when he was not on a fire. He and others created trails in the forest and also maintained existing trails. He also repaired telephone lines. People whose name was high on the ladder stayed near camp or in town until they were called onto a fire.
- 130 Compton was scared but confident before his first jump. After the first jump, he wanted to jump all the time.
- 145 Compton and his friend, Bernie Nielsen, were competitive. Compton told a story about boxing each other at Boise Junior College to prepare for a boxing match. Compton and Nielsen were, and still are, good friends.
- 160 Compton and other former smokejumpers meet four times a year for coffee. He told about how they started the group and what things they talk about when they are there.
- 180 Leo Cromwell kept records on who jumped on what fire. Compton talked about Cromwell record keeping and specific fires during 1947. He talked about Sheep Mountain Creek fire, which began as a two-person fire but

became a much larger fire. Eventually sixteen jumpers fought that fire. Cromwell teaches school in Boise and still spends his summer in McCall fighting fire.

- 225 Compton thought two things—smokejumping and playing football on Lyle Smith’s undefeated 1947 Boise Junior College team—really effected his life.
- 245 Compton furnished his opinions about the 1949 Mann Gulch fire in Montana. He said that he and another jumper outran a fire once, but it was nothing like the Mann Gulch fire.
- 270 Compton also provided his thoughts about the 1994 Storm King fire in Colorado. He and Bernie Nielsen felt that the people on that fire made some bad decisions. Compton also gave his opinions about female smokejumpers. He met one woman who jumps, and Compton felt she could hold her own.
- 305 The discipline, according to Compton, was similar between military training and smokejumping. He worked just as hard fighting fires as he did in the military. Compton also said that everyone he knew did their share of the work during a fire.
- 340 Compton talked about some stories that are told during the coffee meetings. He told a story about Mexicans who helped the smokejumpers fight a large fire.
- 365 Ray Mansisidor and Kenny Roth, two smokejumpers, traded their spots to Compton and Nielsen so they could jump before they returned to Boise Junior College. That jump was the last of the season. Compton told a story about Kenny Roth and another smokejumper—Dick Wilcomb—going to a Boise State University football game.
- 410 During one jump Compton and Nielsen ran their chutes into each other, which created a noise. Neither were hurt. He also told a story about one smokejumper walking on the parachute of another jumper.

450 Compton was a lookout in 1949. He told a story about  
serving as a middle person between two people in an  
Arkansas forest. He relayed messages between the two, so  
they could communicate with each other.

485 **END OF SIDE TWO**  
**END OF INTERVIEW**

## NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Blanton, J. Charles  
Boise Junior College  
Cromwell, Leo  
Hawley, Clyde  
Idaho City, Idaho  
Kuna, Idaho  
Mann Gulch Fire (Montana)  
Mansisor, Ray  
McCall, Idaho  
Nielsen, Bernie  
Nielsen, Glen "Ace"  
Pack Saddle Creek Fire  
Pape, Don  
Roth, Kenny  
Sheep Mountain Creek Fire  
Shore Lodge (McCall, Idaho)  
Smith, Lyle  
Storm King Fire (Colorado)  
Stover, James "Smoky"  
The Foresters' Club (McCall, Idaho)  
The Mill (McCall, Idaho)  
The Yacht Club (McCall, Idaho)  
Wendell, Idaho  
Wilcomb, Dick